Reno, Morgan

Wray, A2

Historical Fiction Essay

**The Tower Game**

*“I don’t know that I’m really able to describe it. It was the most horrific scene I have ever seen in my whole life” – New York Mayor, Rudolph W Giuliani*

I hear my husband’s dreaded alarm to my right, its already 6:30 am. Six represents the six meals I will make during the course of the day for my two young kids and 30 are the amount of minutes I have during my day that are purely peace and quiet. Mark groans, stretches his toned shoulders and rolls out of bed, shuffling his feet on the cold hardwood floor as he staggers into the bathroom. Before my 7:00 a.m. alarm sounds, my husband’s drowsy person is now neatly put together, briefcase in hand, heading out the door. He’s been busy lately; I can tell because he rushes so quickly to work in the morning he forgets to kiss me goodbye. Its Tuesday, September 11th, 2001, I’ve always remembered this date because seven years ago today, Mark proposed to me. We got married eight years ago in California where we both lived. Our beloved little boys Hunter and Brooks arrived one year later and life couldn’t have been any better. I was especially happy that even during the rough economic times, Mark had a stable and well-paying job that allowed our family to live a comfortable lifestyle. That’s why when Mark’s company, Marsh Insurance Brokers, asked him to move to New York to work at the World Trade Center as the Executive Vice President, we both agreed it was the right thing to do. Its 7:00 a.m. and my alarm sounds. I quickly get ready and walk into the boys’ room, opening their curtains with a jubilant “good morning sunshine’s!” From our penthouse apartment, I am able to see the vast blue sky, outstretched over the mountainous buildings of New York City. I can tell it is going to be a good day. Hunter and Brooks look at me with tired eyes, but convinced that they will get up and get ready, I leave them be.

Dancing into the kitchen to start breakfast, I notice that the files Mark was stressing over last night are sitting on the kitchen counter. Before I can react, as if he had read my mind, the phone rings. “Hello?” I say.

“Hi honey, I’m about to go into a meeting, but I left some important papers on the counter, do you think you could bring them to my office within the hour?” Mark asks.

“Sure,” I say. “I’ll have the neighbor come watch the boys and I’ll drop them off with your receptionist as soon as I can get downtown.”

By the time the taxi drops me off on the corner of Liberty and Trinity Place, it’s 8:40 a.m. Even though the buildings surrounding me tower overhead, I can see the cloudless, blue sky and I smile to myself. The winters in New York are freezing… but nice days like today remind me that the move from California to New York was worth it. A cool breeze soon interrupts my thoughts as I walk into the air-conditioned lobby of the North tower. I have to dodge a few hustling businessmen, but I reach the receptionist’s desk and avert her attention away from her computer and onto me. “Good morning” I say, “my husband, Mark Harwood, left these papers at home this morning. Can you make sure he gets them within the hour?”

“Of course,” she says, dabbing a sticky note with my instructions onto the front of the files. Glancing down at my watch, its 8:46 a.m. If I’m able to get a taxi, I should be home in time to relieve my neighbor and take the boys to school myself.

I open my mouth to thank the receptionist, but a loud, erupting noise takes the place of my words. Everyone around me stops and looks around for the source of the atrocious sound. Simultaneously, as if it were a scene from the twilight zone, the lights flicker and the grand chandeliers overhead begin to rattle their delicate pieces. Before anyone has time to react, a police officer runs though the revolving door. “Get out! Everyone out!” He shouts, motioning outside. Unaware of what is going on, I, along with everyone else in the lobby, run towards the exit. Judging by his panicked demeanor, there is no time to question his authority. Once outside, I find myself in a crowd of bewildered and stunned strangers. “Oh my God!” “What the hell is going on?” “What just happened…oh my God!” I hear people scream.

From every direction I can hear sirens, gasps, and the rapid chatter of those nearby. As I stand on the sidewalk in my own disbelief, I look up at the tower and see a cloud of black smoke billowing from the upper third of the building. An electric shock runs up my spine as I realize that Mark is still in the tower.

Looking up again, I notice the enormous cloud of black dust further invading the blue sky. I keep thinking to myself, what a terrible accident this is, and shaking my head in disbelief. Though with the abundance of policeman, paramedics and fireman, I am somewhat assured that Mark, and everyone else is the building, is going to be okay. “Oh my God! Is that another plane?” someone yells out from behind me. “Oh my God! Its headed towards the South tower…Oh my God, what’s going on?” This time, I become aware that this is no accident.

Instinctively, I pull out my cell phone and immediately dial Mark’s number. It rings, but he doesn’t answer. My heart barley has time to sink before the plane is sucked into the South tower and the building begins to crumble within 20 seconds. It’s 9:03 a.m. and realizing that we are now in immediate danger, I find myself and those around me running into the nearest building. Once inside I turn to the woman next to me, and without thinking, we cling on to each other. Within her cries I can hear her muttering “my son, my son…” as she shakes in my unstable arms. Still completely oblivious to what just occurred, I sob uncontrollably as a blanket of smoke, ash and debris envelops the city.

As the dust begins to settle, I realize that I am caught up in a moment of utter terror and hysteria. I emerge from the building to a truly horrific scene. Slowly, people are becoming aware of the situation and the screams and cries that escape their lips harmonize into a piercing melody. The sounds from people are terrifying enough, but the reverberations from the crumbling towers are haunting. The bending and snapping of steel is like nails on a chalkboard and it rings in my ears until I can’t separate the sounds around me from my own. In one spot, a jagged four-story section of the South tower juts straight into the air. In another area, a six-story section lies flat on its side.

It’s hard to take my eyes off of the buildings, but it is hard to breathe, and I see people closer to the buildings beginning to suffocate from the ash. I pull my white blouse over my mouth and nose in attempts to breathe more easily. Amidst the overlying cloud of smoke there are tiny pieces of glass and hundreds of scattered papers falling to the already littered New York pavement. I notice mother’s tucking their small children into tight corners to avoid debris, and I see groups of people huddled together, staring in shock at the mangled buildings.

I’m surprised when I can hear my phone ring. “Yes? Hello?” I yell into my phone.

“Jen! Oh thank God…it’s me. I’m okay, I…I…I’m fine. Its hard to breathe and its hot… but I’m not…. Oh God…. someone just jumped…jumped out the window…Jen what happened?,” Mark cries to me.

“Planes…big commercial planes hit the towers…I’m really not sure.” I admit to him. “Mark, you need to get out!”

“Jen I can’t…the stairs are blocked and we’re trapped. 15….20 of us,” he coughs into the phone. “We tried going down but the elevators don’t work and the stairways are filled with smoke. We’re knee deep in water and there’s black smoke…I’ll be fine, I’ll be okay,” Mark says, reassuring himself. “Jen, there are more people who need to use this phone but I….

----------------The line goes dead----------------

“Mark….Mark? Mark!” I cry.

I hang onto the phone as if it is a lifeline and I sob. My knees give out and I fall to the ground. Although there are groups of people around me, I feel completely alone. Even if Mark makes it home, I realize there will be no happy endings today.

I look up and through the scattered masses I take note of the real lifelines around me. Hundreds of fireman and medics are rushing around the streets and in and out of the buildings trying to help whoever they can. They look like zombies, caked in ash, clogged with smoke and pained with devastation. One by one they go in and out with damp shirts over their mouths to prevent the toxic black smoke from invading their lungs. Some come out with a corpse or an injured man or woman. Others don’t come out at all.

Looking around I notice that a small store across the street has become a makeshift morgue. Bodies lie on the ground, some dead from the inhalation of smoke, others from third degree burns. Those who were incinerated in the flames fall to their final resting places in the form of ash. As I scan the area for any sign of hope my eyes become fixated on a woman etching “God Bless America” into the layers or smoke and debris that have settled on the concrete.

Finding enough strength to finally stand, I realize I can’t just sit here and feel sorry for myself. Taking initiative, I run up to an attending policeman. “Sir, please. What can I do to help?” I ask.

“There is nothing. There is nothing anyone can do,” he admits as he bites his lower lip and closes his agonizing eyes, shaking his head.

Again, I glance down at my watch. It’s 6:00 p.m. and only now have the streets been cleared to allow the fire trucks and ambulances through. It feels like I’ve only been downtown for a few minutes, but it has been ten long hours. All I have accomplished is waiting, watching and sobbing. I’m sure the sun is going down by now, but I wouldn’t know because the thick black clouds have sheltered us from any light. Firemen are lining up and doing head counts. I get a quick glimpse of the chief fireman as he hangs his head low as he realizes how many men he’s lost. “300 unaccounted for,” he shouts to the officer I had talked to moments ago. I also take note that no one around him has enough energy to put a comforting hand on his shoulder. Others are trolling over the large pieces of concrete and metal looking for some sign of human life. I back away to allow a fireman more room to set yet another body down.

As I roam the streets feeling completely helpless, hours have gone by. I have seen no sign of Mark and I have lost count of how many times I have called his phone without an answer. It’s dark now, not from the ash and debris, but because it is already 9:00 p.m. News stations are still lined up interviewing survivors and officials and people are still hard at work looking for any more signs of life under the rubble. There must be two- dozen doctors and 1,000 firefighters continuing to work, I think to myself. Emergency powered generators now guide these rescue workers as they slice through crumbled pieces of concrete and metal looking for survivors. Earlier in the evening they were using blades and chain saws, but now rescue workers are using their hands in effort not to harm anyone that may be under the rubble. “There’s 30 feet of debris,” an official says to his commanding officer. “We can see them, we just can’t get to them,” he shakes his head in despair.

Finally coming to the realization that there is nothing I can do, I head towards home. The streets are desolate and caked in grey ash, I feel ghostly and emotionally drained. As much as I try to think of other things, I can’t help but continue to hear the sound of metal poles snapping and people screaming in horror. I’m walking up Broadway when my mind-numbing thoughts are sharply interrupted by the ring of my cell phone.

“Hello?” I quickly answer.

“Jen, sweetheart it’s me. I’m fine. A few… a few of us were able to make it out, he says tiredly. “There are a few more things I need to do here but I’ll be home as soon as I can. Oh and Jen? I love you so much.”

I drop to my knees and cry. I feel disgustingly selfish, but I cry tears of joy. There were so many people today that we’re not as lucky to receive that phone call from their loved ones. I can finally breathe. “Thank you God, thank you for not taking him,” I cry. I walk into my apartment feeling zombie-like and hell-stricken. I’m not sure what I look like but judging from my neighbor’s wide-eyed expression and quiet nod, she isn’t about to ask me how my day was. With an understanding embrace, she slips out the door and goes home. I hear the sound of Hunter and Brooks giggling and I saunter into their bedroom. I gaze at my precious boys and then giggle to myself as I realize that, for the first time, I am jealous of them. I am envious of the innocence they exude as they playfully dance around the room. They do not have a care in the world or a sense of what took place today.

I then look closer at what they are doing. They have taken their twin mattresses and are balancing them upright. Then, when the mattresses are finally balancing on their own, the boys spread their arms wide like a plane and run into the two mattresses, knocking them over.

“Mommy look!” Hunter points….“It’s the tower game!”

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* Tuesday, September 11th, 2001
* “In one spot, a jagged four-story section of the building jutted straight into the air. In another area, a six-story section lay flat on its side.”
* Makeshift morgue
* “God Bless America” etched in ash
* Used blades and chainsaws and then switched to hands for safety
* 30 feet of debris
* “We can see them, we just cant get to them” –Fireman

Henshall, Ian, and Rowland Morgan. *9/11 Revealed: The Unanswered Questions*. New York: Carrol & Graf, 2005. Print.

* Upper third of the building was damaged in the North tower
* At 6:00 p.m. streets were finally cleared for medical vehicles
* Color described as “grey ash”

Murphy, Dean E. "A Day of Terror: The Hopes; Survivors Are Found In the Rubble." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 12 Sept. 2001. Web. 20 Feb. 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/12/us/a-day-of-terror-the-hopes- survivors- are-found-in-the-rubble.html?ref=sept112001>.

* Upon the plane’s impact in the North tower, on the ground floor in the lobby, lights flickered and chandeliers shook
* People on ground floor told to evacuate
* People knee deep in water
* Elevators broken
* Stairways too smoke filled to go up or down in most areas of the building
* People in the towers were in line to use land line phones
* 300 firemen unaccounted for

Murphy, Dean E. *September 11: An Oral History*. New York: Doubleday, 2002. Print.

* Liberty and Trinity Place
* First plane hit at 8:46 a.m.
* Second plane hit at 9:03 a.m.
* South tower took 20 seconds to crumble
* *“I don’t know that I’m really able to describe it. It was the most horrific scene I have ever seen in my whole life” – New York Mayor, Rudolph W Giuliani*
* The planes that hit were commercial airlines
* Emergency generators used at night
* Broadway Street
* The Tower Game

Shaler, Robert C. *Who They Were: Inside the World Trade Center DNA Story : The Unprecedented Effort to Identify the Missing*. New York: Free, 2005. Print. Times, The New York.

* March Insurance Brokers
* Hard to breathe, people were suffocating and dying from amount of smoke
* People dying from third degree burns
* People walking on big masses of concrete looking for life
* Two-dozen doctors and 1,000 firemen

"Accounts From the North Tower." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 26 May 2002. Web. 20 Feb. 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/05/26/nyregion/26NTOWER.html?scp=1>.

* Cloudless, blue sky
* Tiny pieces of glass and thousands of papers floating down from the towers
* People were jumping out of the windows
* News stations interviewing survivors and officials